

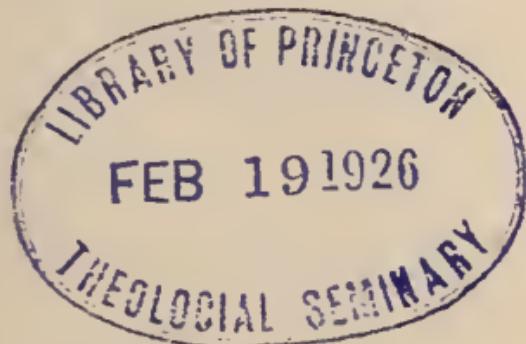
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The Iniquity of Christian Missions in China

By ROBERT E. SPEER
Secretary of the Presbyterian
Board of Foreign Missions.



*The Board of Foreign
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THE INIQUITY OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONS IN CHINA

BY ROBERT E. SPEER

Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions.

There appeared a few days ago, in *The New York Times*, an article by Mr. Sydney Brooks, entitled "Regulation of Missionaries in China." Its main propositions were that missionaries have no right to be in the interior of China, and that, whether there or on the coast, they are supported only by foreign arms, that they are ignorant, untactful and troublesome, and doing not a little evil, and that they are responsible for the present difficulties. The remedy proposed is that missionaries should be deprived of their foreign protection, and even of their foreign citizenship.

A good deal of this sort of thing has appeared in the newspapers lately. It is easy to write, for it requires no patient study of facts, and it pleases many people, who are not reluctant to find reasons for refraining from supporting the missionary enterprise. And it is in the main harmless. Indeed, it is

encouraging in a way, for it shows that some who would be glad to pass missions b. as unimportant and ineffectual are forced to confess their power. Such articles are scarcely worth answering, save to call attention now and then to their extravagances and to make them an occasion for setting a little more clearly before the public the significance and character of Christian missions.

Mr. Brooks's article especially would not call for notice if it were not for its plausibility and the publicity it has received. It is not original, it is not intelligent, and it is not true. It is in part a condensation of Mr. Alexander Michie's books on "Missionaries in China," and "China and Christianity," with scant credit given to Mr. Michie, and with little of the "openness of mind" which the author credits to Mr. Michie, and which saves that stringent critic from the unpleasant spirit and the indiscriminate sneers of Mr. Brooks, and from some of his blunders. "The Chinese," he says, for example, "cannot for a moment be brought to believe that women who . . . worship in the same church along side of men can possibly be moral." There are tens of thousands of Chinese temples which testify against this judgment. There are no separate temples, or hours of worship for men and women in China. "Men and women," as a correspondent of *The China Mail* writes, "come and go (in the temples),

acquaintances and absolute strangers elbowing each other, rubbing against each other, tens and scores and hundreds of them." That has been Chinese usage, and is not regarded as an outrage on ethical propriety. As a matter of fact, Christian worship is more orderly, more ethically correct than the worship in Chinese temples. Let any traveler attend the most popular temples in Canton, for example, and then any Christian chapel or church, many of which have partitions separating the sexes, and contrast them. It is true that the infamous publications sent out by Chou Han from Hunan made some such criticism as that of Mr. Brooks; but it was with slanderous and malicious purpose, and the temples of Hunan daily refuted his falsehood.

Each of Mr. Brooks's propositions is surrounded by such misinformation. He alleges that the missionary's "presence in the interior is in itself a violation of a solemn compact." What compact? Residence and acquisition of property by missionaries in the interior of China are guaranteed by clear treaty provisions, confirmed by imperial edicts, and acknowledged by the Chinese officials. The British treaty of 1858, Art. XII., contains the words, "British subjects, whether at the ports or at other places, desiring to build, etc." More than once Consuls and Chinese officials have interpreted these

words as giving the right to reside and purchase property in the interior. In some treaties (Netherlands, Austrian, Spanish) it is declared that merchants "shall not be at liberty to open houses of business or shops in the interior;" but no treaty contains such restrictions as to missionaries. In the Chinese text of the French treaty of 1858, Art. III., it is stated, "It is permitted to French missionaries to rent and purchase land in all the provinces and to erect buildings thereon at pleasure." Whatever questions others may have raised about this clause, the Chinese Government has never denied its authenticity or validity. Indeed, Chinese officials of their own accord have often extended these rights to missionaries, and on the declaration of war between China and Japan, the Chinese Foreign Office at Pekin addressed to the Ministers of foreign countries a memorandum requesting them to notify missionaries to remain at their posts, and promising all such the protection of the Chinese Government. The rights of merchants and traders to reside and purchase property in the interior are far less solidly established than those of missionaries. Indeed, the Netherlands treaty, which in Art. III. denied to merchants the right of carrying on business in the interior, provided in Art. IV. that "Netherlands missionaries of the Christian religion, intent upon the peaceful propagation of the Gospel in the interior of

China, shall enjoy the protection of the Chinese authorities." I ask, What solemn compact is violated by the presence of missionaries in the interior?

But it is asserted also that the missionary is "supported and protected by foreign arms," that "the evangelists are maintained by foreign arms; they live within call of the avenging gunboat, and they are not backward in summoning its aid." The Presbyterian Board has twenty-one stations in China, at which missionaries reside. Of these, nine at the most are within reach of gunboats. The great majority of missionaries are in the interior, and I do not believe that Mr. Brooks can cite one instance where missionaries alone have summoned a gunboat's aid. There may have been such, but I cannot remember one. Large bodies of missionaries in China are opposed on principle to doing such a thing, and of those who are not, the majority would rather suffer the petty difficulties of oppression and injustice that resort to such an extreme measure; and have so suffered quietly, or resorted only to peaceful representations to their Consuls. But doubtless Mr. Brooks does not intend to be taken literally here. If he does, then I have only to say that his statement is false, most of all, his declaration that the missionaries are not backward in appealing for armed interference. I suppose he means, however, by these reckless statements, only that "mis-

sionaries were thrust upon him (the Chinese) through treaties exacted by foreign coercion" and that the Chinese "Government protects them against its own inclinations, and against the sense of the people, through fear of foreign pressure." He neglects to state that the wars which were terminated by these treaties were fought for the sake of commerce, and the first one, as the Chinese maintain, in behalf of a ruinous and abhorrent traffic; that no war has ever been waged nor any battle been fought for the imposition of missionaries upon China or for their protection. And the implication of this second quotation I have just made from his article is the common and erroneous one that the Chinese Government has a peculiar dislike of the missionaries as such, while it has learned to endure other foreigners. "When the ordinary foreigner is tolerated," says Mr. Brooks, "they (missionaries) are hated." "The trader, the consul and the diplomat have won their position. They are not liked, but they are acquiesced in." Now it is significant that in the very document to which Mr. Brooks appeals as proposing "the best and only means of escape" from present difficulties, the Chinese Government declares, "The Chinese Government . . . is not opposed to the work of the missions." Innumerable edicts and proclamations have commended the missionaries. I have before me a copy of one of these

issued by the Emperor in 1844, sixteen years before the treaties which Mr. Brooks says thrust missionaries on China. The Rescript of Prince Kung, issued in 1862, declared: "The missionaries are well-disposed men, and are in their own country greatly respected by others, and whereas their first object is to instruct men to do good, they must be treated with more than usual high consideration." Scores of proclamations to the same effect have been issued by local prefects. One issued in 1895, by the Prefect of Nanking, will serve as illustrative of many: "Now having examined the doctrine halls in every place pertaining to the prefecture, we find that there have been established free schools where the poor children of China may receive instruction; hospitals where Chinamen may freely receive healing; that the missionaries are all really good; not only do they not take the people's possessions, but they do not seem to desire men's praise. . . . Although Chinamen are pleased to do good, there are none who equal the missionaries." Prior to the issue of this proclamation, the magistrate invited the missionaries to dinner, and treated them with unusual honor. If it is said that these utterances are insincere, and exacted by "fear of foreign pressure," it may be replied that there are too many cases in which such suspicions can be proved to be unfounded.

I do not cite these edicts as worthy of ac-

ception at face value, but only as supporting the assertion that the official utterances of the Chinese Government are favorable to missions, and that the insinuation that Christian missions, as such, are detested by the Chinese is unjust. Christianity is objected to primarily not because of its doctrines or practices, but because it is a foreign religion, and because European Governments have succeeded in deeply impressing its foreign connections upon the Chinese mind by the way they have made it a cat's paw, and pretext of political and territorial aggrandizement. This view is easily capable of proof. The very placards and publications which produce anti-missionary disturbances speak of the missionaries not as Christian propagandists, but as foreign intruders. "Attack and beat the foreigners." "Determinedly destroy the Western men." These are specimens of Hunan mottoes. "All dealings with foreigners are detestable. These men have no fathers or mothers. Their offspring are beasts," is a sample Canton proclamation, scattered in a city where the Chinese have been dealing commercially with foreigners for hundreds of years. Such placards are issued where there are no missionaries. As soon as news arrived that Shashi was to be made an open port in 1896, anti-foreign placards were posted over the city. There have been, and according to ex-Consul Read are, no missionaries at

Shashi. And outrages are not confined to the persons of missionaries. Mr. Margary was not a missionary, and it is the Ministers, not the missionaries, who have been the centre of attack in Pekin.

The missionary appears prominently because he is everywhere. He is the only foreigner that most of the Chinese see. He lives where no trader will go. And so he bears the brunt of anti-foreign dislike. For this his reward is the sneers and ignorant reviling of men like Mr. Brooks. The missionary is doing his own work, but he is doing, too, the work of civilization. He is its vanguard. As has been well said, "China has been opened professedly by treaty, but China has to be opened by something else besides a treaty. There is an enormous amount of personal and friendly contact work to be done and that is being done by missionaries on a scale of magnitude, with a diffusiveness, and general tactfulness, that entitle them to commendation, and not censure." The missionary is helping to open the empire, while the reactionary mandarins want to keep it shut. He is indomitable. He has a motive which makes life and comfort of secondary consequence. He secures a lodgment where civilians would fail. "He gets access to the people; he talks to them in their own mother tongue; he shows them that the foreigner is not the horrid monster he has been pictured to them; but

a human being like one of themselves—a man who knows how to be neighborly and courteous, and pays his debts and can be trusted; who visits the sick and helps the poor, and evidently seeks the good of the community where he is. His notions as they consider them, about a resurrection from the dead and a future life, may not interest them much; but the man himself they do appreciate, and they say that if all foreigners conduct themselves like that, they cannot be such a bad lot after all."

But this is not Mr. Brooks's view. In his opinion, missionaries are "not well educated," are untactful, careless of local prejudice, speaking a "bastard Chinese," guilty of "blundering provocation," ignorant of "the philosophy he is intent on overthrowing or the language which must be his chief weapon," bigoted and sectarian, "enthusiastic girls who scamper up and down the country." I should like to have the names of the missionaries in China with whom Mr. Brooks is personally acquainted, and who have supplied him with that knowledge of them and their disgraceful defects which alone can entitle a man to issue such a slanderous representation. I know more than two hundred missionaries in China, and am familiar with the methods of selection and the requirements of the various missionary boards and societies at work there, and I have met also many foreigners

in China in other occupations, and I place my knowledge against Mr. Brooks's ignorance in saying that the average missionary is far better educated, better bred, more familiar with the people, their language and their thought, and infinitely more in sympathy with them, than the average foreigner, and that no other foreigners in China—merchants, traders or diplomats—are superior to the best missionaries, and very few of them their equals. With that open-mindedness which Mr. Brooks so admires in others, Mr. Michie avoids any such indiscriminate abuse as Mr. Brooks allows himself in his unrelieved picture of missionary incompetency. "The great service which missionaries have rendered to the cause of knowledge can never be forgotten," wrote Mr. Michie, seven years ago. "It is to their labors that we owe what we know of the Chinese history, language and literature. Missionaries compiled the only dictionaries as yet in common use; a missionary translated the classics into English, laying the whole world under perpetual obligation; missionaries have explained the Chinese religions. A missionary has quite recently made a valuable contribution to descriptive anthropology, the first attempt at a systematic analysis of the Chinese character. And, turning toward the Chinese side, the missionaries have the credit of awakening thought in the country, and their great industry in circulating useful and

Christian knowledge in vernacular publications of various sorts, though comparatively barren of result in its main purpose, has spread the light of Western civilization far and wide in the Empire. The benefits conferred on China by these literary labors, and especially by medical missions" (for which Mr. Brooks has not one appreciative word), "are fully acknowledged by educated Chinese who have no leaning toward Christianity as a religion." Li Hung Chang is one of these. "You have started," he told the representatives of missionary organizations in New York, Sept. 1, 1896, "you have started numerous educational establishments which have served as the best means to enable our countrymen to acquire a fair knowledge of the modern arts and sciences of the West." The missionaries are the most intelligent foreigners in China. They are the true representatives of the West. They are organizing the schools and colleges which the Chinese themselves are founding. They have been interpreters for our Consuls and Ministers. For years a missionary did the work of the American Legation in Pekin, while others bore the title and the credit. And these are not merely exceptional men. Almost all missionaries are required to pass language examinations, and if any fail to acquire the Chinese, they are quietly retired. As for their being poorly educated, almost all the men sent from America

are college graduates, and the women far better educated than ordinarily well educated women at home. Mr. Brooks could learn many things from a proclamation of the Prefect of Paotingfu in 1895, in which he said, The missionaries "are chosen from men of superior character and learning, who, after successfully passing an examination, are suffered to come out to China. Moreover, none of the missionaries of these societies come at the commission of their sovereigns, nor are they animated by any other motive than to obey the last command of Jesus, who bade all His followers without fail to preach the religion far and wide, and thus fully attest the sincerity of their faith and love. Refusing to do this, though members of the society, He could not recognize them as of the highest character."

Mr. Brooks condemns the missionaries for their hostility to ancestral worship, their contempt for Chinese superstitions like *fungshui*, or geomancy, the seclusion and secrecy of their work, and their protection of their converts. As to ancestor worship, a few missionaries plead for toleration, but the great majority believe that the rites of worship are idolatrous, though at the same time they appreciate the immense value of the spirit of filial piety, and endeavor to preserve what is not idolatrous in it. As to local geomantic prejudices, perhaps headstrong and thought-

less men have sometimes acted unwisely (can Mr. Brooks give instances ?); but the missionary is the last person to view the animosity of the people with indifference. He wants to gain a hospitable entrance and to conciliate the people, and succeeds in doing so. "To the credit of the missionaries," says Mr. Michie, who denies the spontaneous friendliness of the people to missionaries, which no one asserts, "it must be said that wherever they settle they gain the affection of many of the natives." As to the secrecy of Christian work, Mr. Brooks is referring evidently to Roman Catholic missions, as he singles out "especially the secrecy of the confessional." I shall not speak of this, save to say that Protestant churches, schools and hospitals are ever open to inspection, and invite the fullest scrutiny. As to the protection of converts, Mr. Brooks charges that they come usually from the lower classes, that they are dishonest debtors who want protection from Chinese courts. The missionary "fights their legal battles for them, supplying them with money and advice, and securing for them a sort of consular protection by means of which their suits are transferred from Chinese to foreign courts." This question of the protection of converts is to many missionaries a difficult one. Some will not touch the lawsuits of native converts at all. Others will interfere only in cases of persecution because of their

religion, while still others insist that these are just the cases in which there should be no interference. That there is possibility of abuse here, all missionaries admit. One of their most difficult tasks is to sift the motives of inquirers, in order to refuse those who want to join the Church for the sake of such help. The practice of missionaries is not uniform as yet, but the principle on which all Protestant missions act is to avoid interference as far as they can possibly do so, and to exclude this political element from the Church. This is a point on which they part widely from the Roman Catholics. They flatly refused to accept the privileges secured to the Roman Catholic missionaries by the French Minister in 1899, enlarging their political influence and prescribing certain rights of visit and communication between Catholic missionaries and provincial officials, which the latter had previously refused. As the bishops of the Anglican Communion in China wrote to Mr. Conger, "We have no wish to complicate our spiritual responsibilities by the assumption of political rights and duties, such as have been conceded to the Roman Catholic hierarchy." Mr. Brooks's contemptuous opinion of the character of the converts has been sufficiently belied by the heroism with which scores, perhaps hundreds, of them have met death without denying their faith, when a little of that hypocrisy which, accord-

ing to Mr. Brooks, brought them into the Church, might have saved them in their time of trial.

For this time of trial, Mr. Brooks holds the missionaries responsible. "Of the needless causes of irritation the missionary is easily the most prominent." And he begins his article by discrediting the plea which the missionaries may make, that the political pressure of the West and the seizure of territory and "the endless demands for concessions are the real occasions of this semi-national uprising." Well, let some one else than a missionary be heard. Mr. Barrett, formerly Minister to Siam, is as reliable a witness as Mr. Brooks. "The spread of Christianity in the province of Shantung," he says, "met with few checks until the commercial spirit of a great European country apparently inspired it to seize a portion of Chinese territory and a port in this province. . . . Whenever it was my privilege to discuss anti-foreign sentiment with intelligent Chinese, I found invariably that they placed the chief blame upon the land-grabbing spirit of the European countries." Surely the Chinese Government itself is competent to testify on this point, and this is its judgment, put forth in an edict issued in July: "Since the first days of our dynasty, all the foreigners coming to China have been invariably treated with liberality, and, coming down to the eras

of Taokwang (1821) and Hienfung (1851), we concluded with them treaties of commerce and intercourse and conceded to them the right of propagating Christianity. Latterly, however, the foreigners have come to encroach on our territories, to rob us of our good people and to plunder by force our properties, thus trampling under their feet this favored land of ours. Thus have they deeply wronged us, and the results have been the destruction of their churches and the murder of their missionaries."

But it is not right for the sake of argument to assent to such a partial statement. A dozen things enter into anti-foreign feeling in China. Its sources are found in the Chinese officials, their character and their education, in the agents of foreign powers, in the Chinese people, in the spirit of Western peoples, in foreign trade and its representatives, in the Roman Catholic Church, in the Protestant missionaries also, and in the history of China's relations with the West. It is unphilosophical as well as unfair to single out any one of these and lay the blame there alone. As Mr. Brooks himself admits, "possibly most of the antagonism is fundamental." Assuredly it is, but not, as he says, "inevitable." If missions had been let alone, free from the burden of the political blunders and misdeeds of the West, and especially free in the case of Roman Catholic missions from the patronage of France

and now of Germany, while the mistakes of individuals and of the movement would have caused some difficulty, this would have been easily lived down, and Christianity would have made its way, as it has been making its way in a hundred fields in China, without political support and with the increasing favor of the people.

“In that case,” Mr. Brooks might ask “why is not my suggestion acceptable, namely, that missionaries should be divested of their foreign citizenship, or at least of their right of political protection? In no other way can the political element in their propaganda be destroyed.” That is a question which I shall answer, not as one who sympathizes with missions, but as a citizen of the State. (1) Such a course would be treason to civilization. The missionary is its forerunner. He makes way for light and human movement. But beside that, to remove from him the shelter and protection of Government is to imperil every foreigner. The Chinese does not stop to distinguish. To put the missionary at his mercy and to acknowledge the right of the Chinese to expel or exclude or assassinate him is to take one step toward gratifying the Chinese desire to exclude all foreigners. (2) Such a course would be criminal. It would be the announcement to China that the missionary was fair game. “Steal his property, kill him, outrage the women,” it would proclaim. “We will

not interfere. We leave them to your barbarous and hideous cruelty to do with as you please." If certain rights had never been granted, to refuse to grant them now would be one thing. Having been granted, to take them away is quite a different thing. (3) Mr. Brooks's proposal is childish folly. He might as sensibly propose that missionaries' passports should be viseed by the man in the moon. This country does not denationalize its citizens, least of all its best citizens. Wherever in this wide world they go, they go under the shelter of its flag, and secure in its certain protection. (4) Such a proposal is insolent effrontery. The missionary is to be denationalized. There is no provision for naturalization of foreigners in China. The missionary is to be a man without a country. The American harlot in Shanghai can fly the Stars and Stripes over her brothel. The American saloon-keeper can demand the Consul's protection in Tien-Tsin. But the missionary, teaching, preaching, healing the sick, is to be an alien and a stranger. Sydney Brooks (I invent the illustration) selling rum in China can claim the rights of his nationality and stand with its whole power behind him. Phillips Brooks preaching the Gospel in China is an outcast, a political pariah. I find it impossible to suppress a feeling of stern indignation at such an infamous and contemptible proposal, infamous and contempti-

ble in its view not so much of the rights of missionaries, as of the duties of civilized States.

But Mr. Brooks alleges that something must be done to regulate the missionary. "Until his relations with the Chinese people and the Chinese Government are radically altered, there can be no hope of settled peace." The shortest answer to that is a flat contradiction. Rather let the European nations stop using missions as the "advance agent of annexation." Let them deal honorably and firmly with China. Let them repent of their folly in throwing away the unparalleled opportunity for peaceful reformation presented in 1898, by the Emperor and Kang Yu Wei—an opportunity produced by missions—and atone by helping China to break with her iron conservatism and shake loose her grave clothes.

And, lastly, and not to follow Mr. Brooks beyond this, even into his curious appeal to the early history of Christianity, the missionary's influence, he holds, is subversive, and his propaganda will have revolutionary effects. In a sense, this is not true. The missionary's work is not destructive. It follows the lines of national character and qualification. Christianity has adapted itself to more peoples, and more diverse peoples, than any other religion, and it is compatible with any orderly and righteous government, of whatsoever form. It does not attack the Chinese political system

or social life. Yet in a sense the charge is true. Christianity is a power of upheaval and renovation. It turns the world upside down. It begets wrath against injustice, eagerness for liberty, impatience with ignorance and sloth, and passion for progress. It has done this in China. It will continue to do this in China, whether in war or in peace, with the sympathy of the Christian nations or with the petty criticism and futile opposition of newspaper publicists. That is its mission in the world. In his naive language, the Prefect of Paotingfu suggests that, if men do not perceive it and are not in sympathy with it, they cannot, by the judgment of Jesus, be regarded "as of the highest character."

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